

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sheriff Refutes Latest BOE Discussions

A National Model – FCSO SRO Program

FREDERICK, Md. (Dec. 23, 2020) – At a recent meeting, conducted Dec. 9, the Frederick County Board of Education (BOE) discussed the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, specifically commenting on the roles of the SRO's, an additional SRO grant of \$168,000, and how SRO's respond to calls during virtual learning. The BOE conducted this meeting without any representation or direct involvement from the Frederick County Sheriff's Office (FCSO), the lead agency of the program within the county.

"For the public's understanding, the details presented to the BOE, by the Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), were wrong and misleading and I would like to clear up some specific details that were cited in the Dec. 11, Frederick News Post article," said Sheriff Chuck Jenkins. "I have always made clear the roles of the FCSO SRO's, however, I can only speak on behalf of my agency and not of the other local agencies that provide SRO support to FCPS.

"First and foremost, Frederick County Government funds the SRO program at approximately \$2.4 million annually and my opinion is at this point it is adequately funded and provides us with the necessary positions to operate the program as it is currently structured. I did not see a need for the additional \$168,000 grant for use by the FCSO."

The Sheriff went on to state that FCPS solely applied for the \$168,000 grant after he provided them guidance that there was no need for FCSO to use the funds. Additionally, the FCSO approved fiscal year 2021 budget accounts for three additional SRO positions, which places SRO staffing numbers and the budget exactly where it should be within the program model.

"The second point I would like to clear up is the discussion of SRO's conducting home visits simply because students are not logging on or doing well in virtual learning," said Jenkins. "We will make home visits under normal circumstances which includes if a child is endangered or at risk, incidents that would require law enforcement involvement, and/or criminal complaints. We do not police whether or not a student misses a virtual class or is not doing their online assignments. These are clearly not law enforcement functions."

On other point of contention the Sheriff wanted to touch on is what the current grant letter outlines as functions that SRO's may support including the meal/food distribution and the educational materials distributions.

"I have made it clear from the start that FCSO SRO's will not participate in these distributions. There are very definitive lines and limits with the SRO's roles in our schools," said Jenkins. "In my view, the distribution of meals and educational materials, and home checks for virtual learning are not among the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement. Our nationally recognized SRO program will continue to operate, leading the way for other agencies to model"

Recognized as a model program by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NARSO) and honored with a National School Safety Award from the School Safety Advocacy Council, the Frederick County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) School Resource Officer (SRO) program is leading the way in SRO programs.

The FCSO first placed SRO's in Frederick County public middle schools on May 1, 2000. FCSO used the United States Department of Justice Cops in Schools grant to assist in the program's inception. After a thorough evaluation, the SRO program moved to focus more on the high school population with attention dedicated to the particular high schools feeder schools. The FCSO and the Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) have a yearly Memorandum of Understanding in place.

The Maryland Safe to Learn Act signed into law in April of 2018 has changed the SRO programs throughout the state. FCSO SRO's previously received SRO certification training through NARSO but now have been certified as SRO's through training mandated by the State of Maryland.

The FCSO SRO program consists of one lieutenant, one sergeant, two corporals, and eleven deputies. The lieutenant assigned an SRO to each of the Frederick County high schools to include the high schools in Frederick city, including Frederick High, Governor Thomas Johnson High, and Heather Ridge.

"In addition to the law enforcement and security roles, these trained deputies act as positive role models, who at times function as teachers of law related topics, and counselors providing guidance related to law enforcement issues," said Lt. Jason Deater, FCSO SRO team lead. "They do not enforce routine school rules and are not involved in routine school discipline."

Deater commented on the respected relationship between FCPS and the FCSO. He stated FCPS routinely invites FCSO SRO's to attend training provided to their staff and teachers. Most recently FCSO SRO's attended, "Finding and Sharing Calm in the Midst of Chaos." FCPS also invited FCSO to attend additional training, at a future date, with the FCPS Mental Health Coordinator and the Accelerated Achievement and Equity Team.

Additionally, FCSO SRO's and patrol team deputies conduct daily school safety checks on elementary, middle school, high school, and alternative schools within the county. There have been more than 1,000 documented school safety checks completed from Sept. 1 until Dec. 21. Many of these safety checks involve schools who are currently distributing meals to students.

"The FCSO, in partnership with FCPS, is currently planning various methods of reintroducing the SRO to the schools when students fully return to school," said Deater. "The FCSO and FCPS understand the hardships faced by the students regarding COVID-19 and online learning. The intention is to provide the students with information related to the SRO program as a way of avoiding additional stressors in their lives and to continue on with our nationally recognized program."

For more information on the FCSO SRO program, contact Lt. Jason Deater at 301-600-7191.

The Frederick County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) is a full-service law enforcement agency; an arm of the court, and a keeper of offenders. In this regard, it exists to serve the more than 250,000 citizens of Frederick County with respect, fairness, and compassion. FCSO is committed to the prevention of crime; the protection of life and property; the preservation of peace and order; the enforcement of laws and ordinances; the safeguarding of constitutional guarantees; and safekeeping of prisoners. The men, women, and officers of this office nurture public trust by holding themselves to the highest standards of performance and ethics. The FCSO is located at 110 Airport Drive East, Frederick, MD, 21701. Visit www.frederickcosherriff.com for more information.

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